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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001100

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DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED

REF: A. CARACAS 1081
[1](#)B. CARACAS 01068 AND PREVIOUS

CARACAS 00001100 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Economic Counselor Andrew N. Bowen, for reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The government closure of RCTV on May 28 took the only remaining opposition voice off the free airwaves in Venezuela; opposition-oriented 24-hour news station Globovision remains on the air, but is only available in parts of Caracas, Valencia, and Maracaibo without a cable or satellite connection. Civil society leaders, especially students protesting RCTV's closure, are making innovative use of new technologies to fill the informational void caused by the BRV's ongoing efforts to silence critical media. Student protesters are communicating by text message, blogs, and websites to disseminate their messages and avoid government interference. Given the widespread and diverse nature of the protests, blogs and on-line news sites are often quicker to report information than television or radio. Digital media is also allowing protesters to document their activities and government responses as well as extending RCTV's lease on life via YouTube. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) According to AC Nielsen, since RCTV's closure opposition cable network Globovision's market share has increased from 4.1% to 16.3%. Globovision's 24-hour news coverage remains the main source of information for Venezuela's middle and upper classes and it is gaining market share even in poor areas. However, it has had trouble keeping up with the velocity and changing nature of recent student protests. A number of blogs and news sites have become the main sources of up-to-the-minute information, with rumors continually being posted, updated, and then confirmed by witnesses. The news of the murder of a 24-year old Catholic University (UCAB) student, for example, was posted on blogs at least twenty minutes before it was reported by Globovision.

[1](#)3. (C) The success of many of the protests popping up throughout Caracas during the past ten days has been due in part to the students' abilities to avoid heavy police presence. The students have taken an almost "flash mob" approach, communicating locations and times by text message and then assembling seemingly out of nowhere. When the police catch up, the students sometimes then dissipate and begin coordinating the next meeting. Econoffs have received many daisy-chain text messages with different "instructions," from logistical directions for marches to requests to turn off their lights or bang pots at scheduled times.

¶4. (SBU) The protesters have also become heavy users of the popular university website, "Facebook.com," where individuals can post profiles and keep in touch with friends. "Facebook.com" is a closed website (you have to be a member with a valid university or work e-mail address to access it) and members can form groups based on shared interests or experiences. By forming groups, they also create a simple system to share information, where a posting on the group site sends an e-mail to all members to log on to the system and read the message. A number of the Venezuelan student groups have over a thousand members and they are using this system to plan protests and upload photos of their successes.

¶5. (SBU) RCTV's strongly anti-Chavez current events news program "El Observador" has begun broadcasting on the popular video-sharing website YouTube. Its reporters continue working around the country and the May 31 broadcast included coverage of protests in Maracaibo, Merida, Barquisimeto, and Caracas. RCTV microphones remain prominent at press conferences, including those organized by student leaders on June 4 and that of Chacao municipality mayor Leopoldo Lopez on May 29. Lopez, in fact gestured to the RCTV microphone to emphasize they had yet to give in. An RCTV reporter covering Zulia Governor Manuel Rosales' May 31 Caracas press conference was given a round of applause by attendees.

¶6. (SBU) YouTube has also become one of the main sites for the protesters to post videos of demonstrations and of police brutality. According to a recent article in "El Nacional," over 16,000 videos pertaining to the RCTV shutdown have been posted on YouTube. Most of the videos sampled by Econoff are a few minutes long and show students protesting in plazas and blocking roads, often with face paint and banners denoting their support for RCTV and the freedom of expression. The most popular videos are those of police or Chavistas attacking and breaking up demonstrations, including one which shows police chasing a group of students into the entry way

CARACAS 00001100 002.2 OF 002

of an apartment building where they proceed to take pot shots (using rubber bullets) at the defenseless students. A common blog posting includes a publication of a rumor with a request for pictures or video to back up the claim. Many students have compiled photo albums on "Facebook" and other photo sharing sites and are sending photos to friends and family from the protests via their cell phones.

¶7. (SBU) Blogs run by Venezuelans locally and abroad have also become focal points for the movement, providing people with up-to-the-minute information on protests and government reactions. Noticierodigital.com, megaresistencia.com, and caracasradiotv.com are popular rallying points. The students at UCV (Central University of Venezuela, the largest university in Venezuela) have created a website to coordinate the marches (resistenciauniversitaria.com). BRV-owned telecomm provider CANTV has on occasion blocked rctv.net and its Miami mirror site, caracasradiotv.com as well as radionexx.com (a Miami based-radio station) (reftel A) and other blogs and opposition websites seem to have frequent technical problems. Hackers have also entered the fray, attacking the websites of the Ministry of Finance, the government-subsidized Mercal food mission and the Human Rights Ombudsman's office, replacing part of that site with a profanity-laden threat, followed by "vivan los estudiantes."

¶8. (SBU) Most of the middle class neighborhoods of Caracas were filled with the sound of banging pots and pans in protest every night last week, with some varying times and duration via text message instructions. The traditional method of banging pots and pans ("cacerolezando") has also entered the digital age. Rather than tire oneself out by banging pots and pans all night, an enterprising Caraqueno has created a CD with the cacophony. The sound of computer-generated air raid sirens have also been used to dramatize Venezuelans' concerns about BRV attacks on freedom of expression. Caraquenos can rest easy and protest through

noise pollution through the night now by playing the CD with their speakers pointed out the windows.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: The students are clearly aware of the international interest in their activities and protesters frequently carry signs written in foreign languages, from German to Japanese. The blog, "The Devil's Excrement" posted a request for assistance in determining the extent to which CANTV was blocking certain websites and received responses from around the world. The ability of protesters to utilize these means of communication makes it much more difficult for the BRV stop the protests or to spin the news about them. The closure of RCTV definitely will inhibit the ability of the majority of Venezuelans to get news and information, but for the technologically savvy it may have spurred the opening of new outlets and means to expose the authoritarian nature of the Chavez government. END COMMENT.

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